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From Plastic Discs to Ceramics:

TURNTABLE POTTERS-WHEEL

By Donna Schneider

Technical Journalism Sophomore

Editor's note: This is the time for new inspirations, new thoughts; time for experimenting and trying out new ideas. Here's one coed's experiment: hand-made ceramics. Let's see what she did.

A RECORD-PLAYER becomes a potters wheel in an unorthodox but workable process for making pottery. Your phonograph, like mine, can make the switch from spinning records to spinning lumps of clay with only the addition of a home-made plastic shield. The phonograph which I use as a potters wheel still produces music as well as ever, in addition to turning out an array of ceramics ranging from ash trays to bowls.

three-speed record player

The only raw materials necessary are a phonograph, a plastic bag and clay. A three-speed player makes the best potters wheel, for it can be slowed for intricate work. To make the shield cut out a circle the size of the turn-table from a heavy plastic bag and punch a hole in the center for the spindle.

Clay is sold in powder form and mixed with water. I found clay which hardens at room temperature most practical and that aging the clay overnight after mixing makes it more pliable. Then it should be the consistency of butter which has stood at slightly below room temperature. Knead the clay thoroughly to remove lumps and air bubbles.

Now it's time for "turning" the object on the potters wheel. Secure the clay on the spindle of the turn-table. Have a bowl of water handy to keep hands and clay moist. Start the phonograph at 78 rpm.

The basic procedure is the same for any ceramic piece. Press your hands around the spinning lump of clay to center and smooth it. Keep your hands wet while working, but never let the clay feel sticky.

When the clay is centered, form it into a mound. With one hand lower the clay to a workable height, supporting it at the side with the other hand.

Form the center hollow by pressing the thumb of

one hand down on top of the mass while on the outside surface you press the clay inward with the fingers of your other hand. Continue hollowing until the pottery is the size and general shape you want.

Curves are made by varying inside and outside pressure on the walls of the pottery. To make an outward curve, press harder on the inside wall than against the outside wall. To make an inward curve, keep the outside pressure strongest.

After the piece is shaped, slow the phonograph to 33 rpm. to check for flaws and to smooth up the surface. To trim the base hold a knife at an angle at the bottom of the pottery. Press your finger at the base to make a smooth concave curve. All that's left is drying the pottery. Place damp cloths over it to prevent cracking.

After drying, the pottery is ready for displaying or decorating, and your "potters-wheel phonograph" can return to the music-making side of its double life.



An ash tray, the easiest pottery for an amateur to attempt, is finished by smoothing out flaws with hands. A light touch and high speed-spinning are essential here. Finger-prints and crumpled walls plague the heavy-handed at this stage.